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MAYOR LIGHTFOOT JOINS COMMUNITY AND PRESERVATION ADVOCATES TO REOPEN THE HISTORIC MARK TWAIN AND EXPAND AFFORDABLE UNITS IN UPTOWN

Renovation efforts by NFP preserves the historic hotel as an SRO featuring 148 affordable units for individuals on CHA's waitlist on the City's Near North Side

CHICAGO - Mayor Lori E. Lightfoot today joined Chicago Department of Housing (DOH) Commissioner Marisa Novara, Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) Acting CEO James Bebley, Alds. Walter Burnett, Jr. (27) and Harry Osterman (48), Richard Burns, President and CEO, The NHP Foundation, and preservation advocates to celebrate the reopening of the renovated and restored landmark building, The Mark Twain, one of the largest remaining single room occupancy (SRO) affordable housing developments on Chicago's Near North Side.

"This project is a win-win for Chicago, providing the Near North Side nearly 150 affordable apartment units, while also restoring one of the landmarks of this community and one of the largest remaining affordable housing developments in this area," said Mayor Lori E. Lightfoot. "Our future as a city rests in keeping Chicago affordable, and our goal is keeping buildings like this from being the exception. By investing in places like The Mark Twain, we are keeping our families stable, allowing our residents and businesses to thrive, and ensuring Chicago remains a place where everyone can succeed."

The \$54.3 million renovation at 111 W. Division Street consists of 148 apartments, each equipped with rehabilitated private bathrooms and the addition of private kitchenettes. Other enhancements include all new plumbing, mechanical and electrical systems; a rooftop deck, restoration of the vintage facade and lobby and 9,600 square feet of upgraded retail space on the ground floor.

"Single Room Occupancy units are precious, and we are honored to have partnered with the NHP Foundation to preserve 148 units," Commissioner Novara said. "In a part of town where there's so little affordable housing, the renovation and restoration of The Mark Twain is a multi-pronged win and something truly worth celebrating."



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Rental assistance in the form of project-based vouchers will be provided by the CHA for each of the 148 units at the new Mark Twain, ensuring long-term affordability. Fifty residents who lived at the Mark Twain before the rehabilitation project began have returned to the renovated and restored building. The remaining apartments will be leased to people from the CHA waitlist.

“Developments such as the historic Mark Twain highlight the range of CHA’s investment in housing and communities over the past several years,” said Acting CHA CEO Bebley. “We’d like to thank Mayor Lightfoot for her unyielding support of these projects, and others like it, as we continue – together – to create affordable housing opportunities across the city. It is through a shared vision that CHA works with the City to increase opportunities for our most vulnerable citizens.”

As part of its commitment to addressing the affordable housing challenge, the City’s contribution included issuance of \$27.3 million in multi-family housing revenue bonds, a \$5 million multi-family loan and \$1.3 million in Low Income Housing Tax Credits that generated \$12.7 million in equity. The developer, non-profit group, NHP which invests in the preservation of affordable housing citywide, acquired the property in 2016 as part of the City’s SRO Preservation Initiative.

“We are proud of our relationship with the City of Chicago,” said Richard Burns, President and CEO of NHP. “This ribbon cutting celebrates the culmination of nearly five years of effort from acquisition of the old Mark Twain Hotel to total renovation. If it wasn’t for Chicago’s SRO Preservation Ordinance, this property could easily have been demolished. We are grateful for the opportunity to preserve this building and are excited about another SRO we will begin preserving later this year in Lincoln Park.”

The SRO ordinance requires that property owners notify tenants in writing 180 days prior to the sale or transfer of the property and alert affordable housing development organizations to provide an opportunity to consider a preservation investment. Since its passage in 2014, the Single-Room Occupancy Preservation Ordinance has led to the preservation of 11 buildings, consisting of more than 1,400 units of desperately needed affordable housing for some of Chicago’s most vulnerable residents.

“The new Mark Twain will continue to serve Chicago and its residents with modern affordable housing units for some of Chicago’s most vulnerable residents,” said Ald. Osterman. “I would like to thank NFP for their vision of not only preserving this historic landmark, but also for its dedication to creating affordable housing here and across the country.”



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Designed by architect Harry Glube, the five-story Art Deco building features beige brick and white terra cotta accents. The building opened as a rooming hotel in the 1930s, with rates as low as seven dollars per week. It has been operated continuously as an SRO since the 1980s.

The building, which once served as a much-needed resource for area workers, survived extensive urban renewal and street widening projects that cleared many nearby blocks in the 1960s. As a result, the Mark Twain was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in May 2017.

“The Mark Twain will once again serve as beacon for affordable housing on the City’s Near North Side,” said Ald. Burnett. “The creation of affordable housing is the responsibility of the entire City, and I’m proud that this project is located in the ward.”

NHP is a nonprofit organization, founded in 1989 and dedicated to making investments that preserve and create affordable multifamily housing for low to moderate income families and seniors. With offices in New York and Washington, the organization has preserved dozens of properties comprising of more than 11,000 units located primarily along the East Coast from Connecticut to Florida.

The creation and preservation of affordable housing remains a primary focus for the Lightfoot Administration, as housing instability is a major driver of poverty in the City of Chicago. Through a series of new housing reform policies, the administration is working to develop inclusive policies that will work to address the challenges we face: a 120,000 affordable housing unit gap and shrinking federal resources. Namely, the newly formed Inclusionary Housing Task Force will develop lasting citywide strategies, starting first with revisions to the ARO ordinance that will aid in efforts to preserve housing stock for low- and middle-income families across the City.

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